C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 001852

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PREL ASEAN BU SN
SUBJECT: BURMA: PM'S AIDE PROVIDES GAMBARI READOUT, VIEWS
ON NEXT STEPS

REF: A. SINGAPORE 1842 (PM MEETS GAMBARI)

    ¶B. SINGAPORE 1851 (ACADEMIC CALLS FOR BURMA
       SUSPENSION)

Classified By: CDA Daniel Shields, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Lee's Principal Private
Secretary Lawrence Wong provided Charge a readout October 4

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of UN Special Advisor Gambari's Burma mission that tracked
closely with what our UK colleagues heard from Gambari
October 3: Gambari had delivered the international
community's views unambiguously to the generals; he had
limited opportunity to assess the mood on the ground; his
second meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi suggested some progress
in establishing a dialogue; and China had played a key role
in gaining Gambari access to Than Shwe. Wong discussed
growing sentiment that Singapore and ASEAN had to take a
tough stance with Burma's regime. He confirmed that Prime
Minister Soe Win had returned to Burma in recent days after
extended medical treatment here, but denied press reports
that Soe Win had died. END SUMMARY.

Gambari Mission

¶2. (C) Singapore Prime Minister (PM) Lee's Principal Private
Secretary Lawrence Wong told the Charge October 4 that the PM

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found encouraging UN Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari's
readout of his mission (ref A) to Burma, though Wong had few
specific details to provide. Wong, who participated in the
PM's October 3 meeting with Gambari, said Gambari reported
delivering a tough message of international concern to
Burma's top four ruling generals, including Than Shwe and
Maung Aye. Gambari also tried to get an assessment of the
mood among principal actors in the country, though he had not
been able to meet with dissident monks.

¶3. (C) Wong interpreted Gambari's second meeting with Aung
San Suu Kyi (ASSK) as an indication Gambari had succeeded in
initiating, in a very preliminary way, some sort of dialogue
between the regime and the democratic opposition. Wong said
Gambari had credited China with playing a major role in
facilitating his access to Than Shwe and the generals. Wong
said the GOS believes the UN is the proper venue to address
the issue and said next steps would depend on Gambari's
report and recommendations.

¶4. (C)   Wong's account tracks closely with a readout we
obtained the evening of October 3 of a meeting earlier that
day between Gambari and UK High Commissioner Paul Madden.

The High Commission told us Gambari had said he went to Burma with three goals: to convey to the generals a clear sense of international outrage; to assess the situation on the ground; and to initiate a dialogue between the regime and the opposition, including ASSK. Gambari told Madden he had succeeded in conveying the views of the international community to the generals. He had not been fully successful in assessing the situation because his schedule had been fully programmed, allowing him only limited time in Rangoon.

¶5. (C) Gambari declined to provide Madden details on whether he had succeeded in initiating a dialogue until after he had briefed UNSYG Ban Ki-moon on October 4 and the UN Security Council on October 5. However, the High Commission interpreted Gambari's second meeting with ASSK as a hopeful signal. Gambari told Madden that China's had played an important role in "extending his visit."

Burma Diplomacy

¶6. (C) Wong said that the ASEAN Foreign Minister's statement of September 27 reflected a widespread feeling that ASEAN had to take tougher stand on Burma. Frustration with Burma had already been mounting within ASEAN, but events in recent weeks had put ASEAN's credibility and reputation at stake. Wong said there was a consensus among GOS leaders that Singapore could not be on the side of the regime when it obviously had lost the support of the Burmese people. Even so, he did not expect Singapore would consider imposing its own sanctions. If the UN were to impose sanctions, Singapore would support them. Wong agreed with the Charge's observation that the strong ASEAN Foreign Minister's statement of September 27 had put pressure on China. Wong said China was now playing a constructive role. India, by contrast, had been nearly "silent." Commenting on calls from within the ASEAN establishment to suspend Burma's membership, Wong allowed that it was possible if the situation in Burma deteriorated much further (see Ref B).

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¶7. (C) Wong said the GOS believes the generals will have to be part of any solution in Burma and ought to be told clearly that the international community understands this. Otherwise, they will focus only on survival and will have no incentive to reconcile or promote a democratic transition. Wong asked whether the United States has any plans to engage in a high-level dialogue with the regime, though he noted that it was difficult to know whether outside messages ever reached the people who really make decisions in Burma. Even Prime Minister Soe Win, when he was healthy, seemed to have limited influence. Wong recalled a 2005 ASEAN visit to Burma just after the regime announced plans to move its capital from Rangoon; when Soe Win read a prepared statement on the move to the visitors, he was visibly unhappy, seemingly near tears, about the decision, Wong said.

PM Soe Win Alive, Back in Burma

¶8. (C)   Commenting on press reports of Soe Win's possible death, Wong confirmed that Soe Win had left Singapore in recent days after extended medical treatment here. He stated that Soe Win is still alive, but did not provide details on his state of health.

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